



STRATEGY GUIDE & DESIGNER'S NOTES

GENERAL STRATEGY

BLOCKS IN THE WEST is an operational wargame with a deep logistic structure at its heart. It is an easy and deep treatment of the war on the Western Front from *Fall Gelb* to the end of the Reich.

Players are called on to develop strategies, adapt tactics and support both of them with solid logistic planning. The following notes have been developed with the precise intent of being used while playing with **all** the Optional Rules (Master Level).

MANAGING UNITS MOVEMENT

When performing the Movement Phase, it may be very useful to mark the units already moved by placing them face down, in order to avoid confusion and either accidentally moving some units twice or forgetting to move some others.

FOG of WAR – LIMITED INTELLIGENCE

BLOCKS IN THE WEST, as with all the games of this series, has been designed and developed with the precise intention of being played with the Fog of War ON. Playing the game without, can result in altering the results, negating the need of Air Recon and as *bluff* is a major component, and

gives a great advantage to the defender.

The limited intelligence of the block system presents its own challenges.

THE RIGHT SEQUENCE

The order in which the battles are resolved is decided by the attacker.

The attacker should evaluate this very carefully, as resolving one battle before another can dramatically change the results, especially in terms of retreat restrictions.

BREAKTHROUGH

Attacking the whole enemy frontline is always a bad choice, as it can be very costly in terms of losses.

Encircling enemy units is often better than fighting them directly.

The general tactical concept is that, whenever it is possible, you should try to find weak spots in the enemy front line, attack them by concentrating the best of your troops and support units, breakthrough and exploit with armor and mobile formations.

It is also true that sometimes a direct and bloody assault is mandatory, so players should try to find the right mix, encircling the enemy in some situations and attacking directly in some others. This is probably one of the most complicated aspects of this game.

NAVAL MOVEMENT

Moving GU and AU by sea is extremely risky, as mostly all the bodies of water are subject to the *sub-mine die-roll*.

For example, while transferring ground units from US to UK, it is wise to have them all at 2 steps strength (not at full strength, as for some units the last step is very expensive), so if they get 1 hit they are not eliminated nor so costly. Air Units should be moved by airbasing directly from US to UK, and those units such as fighters unable to rebase directly in 1 turn, may rebase in Iceland (where they can overstack) and Azores (normal stack of 1 AU).

AIRBORNE INVASIONS

Remember that only TECH 3 Para units may land in difficult terrain, such as Major Cities, forest, hills... at the cost of 1-step reduction when landing.

When attacking a neutral Power, airborne units get the same benefit as if they were TECH 3.

For this reason only, German airborne may land in Rotterdam during the May 1940 turn, but not in London/Paris, as both UK and France are already at war.

The same consideration is valid for Marine Units when launching amphibious invasions (shoals).

ANTI-AIR

The major criticism about BITE I have received so far, is related to the supposed overpower of Anti-air fire.

In other games the air units, if present, can only be destroyed or survive the combat. In this series indeed, air units have steps, and usually a shield, so even if hit they are only reduced, instead of being removed from play.

There are 2 key features to be always kept in great consideration:

1. the AA fire includes the attrition loss, due to the overusage of planes in extreme combat situations, the aircraft loss due to unreparable damage, crashing during take off and landings and also during training.

The final results have been calculated on the average of WW2 for every power and the aircraft production has been adapted to the historical rates.

2. Planes should be used wisely.

They are a luxury that minor and weak powers cannot afford and the main asset is always the standard infantry. Thus, these precious weapons really can crack the enemy front line when used in combination with heavy artillery fire and tank concentration.

If dispersed, on the contrary, their losses can really be afforded and refilled.

AXIS STRATEGY

In Blocks in the West Italy plays a very small role, and only in the 1943 scenarios where she is already irremediably too weakened to really contribute further to the war.

Thus, in BITW, the real actor for the Axis side is Germany.

Germany is at the edge in all the early scenarios, and can really wipe out individual enemy armies one after another. In the 1940 scenarios, mobility is the key: you must hit hard and fast in both France first and England after. Don't waste the opportunity to finish the match by invading UK, if the conditions allow this ambitious task to be accomplished.

In the late war scenarios, from 1943 on, Germany will start suffering some serious setbacks, especially in terms of fuel and manpower shortages. This will cause a loss in mobility and in reaction ability. But, when playing in defence, it is much better to have a mobile force in reserve mode every turn, ready to

counter a sudden and unexpected early allied landing, instead of trying to attack the beach head later. This powerful nation can be quickly defeated, if not managed by a skilled player.

So, as soon as it becomes clear that the war cannot be won anymore, it's time to be wise and accept that a good defense can at least delay the defeat, inflict heavy casualties on the western allies and maybe even force the US to leave the war.

Germany has 3 strong assets to count on:

Tanks first. Because of superior weapons, tactics, training and leaders, German tanks will reach TECH level 2 and 3 far before any other power. This gives Germany a huge advantage in terms of mobility and firepower, but also a great dependance on OIL. This is Germany's Achille's Heel.

Protecting your vital Romanian Oilfields (if playing in combination with BLOCKS IN THE EAST) and the German hydrogenation plant can really make the difference between victory and defeat.

When moving to defence, it is critical to counter the allied air power. Except for AA fire, which starts firing 6 dice at 6 and goes to the deadly 6 dice at 5/6 only in October 44, the only valuable asset to invest in is the mighty Luftwaffe, with her fighter squadrons and aces. At a certain point the German player will recognize that bombers are not of any use, while flying his BF109 squadrons like mosquitoes against the Flying Fortress really can keep the American and British Air Force at bay. Without strong air cover and total air superiority, Overlord will never happen.

Finally the Forts/Festungs. They are very expensive, as one festung (7 step fort) costs 12 yellow PP, but they quarter the attacker and give an outstanding DOUBLE BONUS to the defender.

Deploy them wisely, and as soon as they risk getting cut off, disband them, get the 1PP point and rebuild later.

ALLIED STRATEGY

France is the weakest allied power and probably will be knocked out of the war very quickly. Then, until the U.S. enters the war, Britain's primary responsibility is to stay alive.

Remember that you don't need to win the war to win the game.

The RAF, the Fighter Command and the Radar Chain are the most valuable

assets the British player can count on, but remember to keep as many GUs as possible in front-beaches to guard from a German invasion. For this reason, withdrawing the BEF from France is your prime objective. Do it quickly. Losing these 3 valuable and irreplaceable corps will not only reduce your survival chance to the minimum, but will also limit your offensive power from 1943 onwards (the 1st corps is a marine infantry, supposed to be committed to both Husky and Overlord landings).

Nevertheless, the first step, the only rebuildable one, costs 3xYellow PP and 3xRed PPs.

Use the *Cash and Carry Act* option wisely. From July 1940, with all the 11 Aircraft factories at work, the only need to pay 3 yellow PPs is to get an extra Red PP, but, although tempting, this is a bad choice in most cases.

As soon as US enters the war, UK can really take a breath and start the heavy bombardment campaign over the Reich, to reduce German industrial power. If, on one hand, the German warmachine runs at full steam, the Soviets will not be able to complete their army deployment and launch a massive general offensive in 1944, while on the other hand, a deadly air campaign could bring the Soviet offensive forward by a year.

Even in 1942, keep a landing force ready in the Channel, or at least let the German player believe you have one.

Again, the Soviets cannot win the war alone, so as many forces the Germans deploy along the Atlantik Wall (and resources building the expensive Forts) the less will be committed in the East.

Play the Casablanca Conference Option, so both Churchill and Eisenhower will be able to launch massive amphibious invasions and gain more command flexibility.

Back to the air war, be sure you hit hard and choose 1 resource type to reduce every turn and be methodic. There is no need for creativity in bombing industrial or urban areas. Spreading your bombers hitting through Red, blue, yellow and black points will have no effects on the powerful German economy.

Don't send your 2 steps bombers against the LW. Wait until they are at full strength. Try to pin at least 1 LW HQ on ground, so limiting the numbers of fighters the German player can send against you, especially from May 1944 when they start rolling at 4&5&6.

Soon it will come the time to land and restore freedom in Europe.

Sicily can be a good learning exercise, but France will be a very different story. Choose the landing site wisely and create a safety ring with your airborne units. If available, deploy your mulberries, otherwise be sure you get a major port. Having your troops offshore without a supply source will lead them to surrender.

Be aware of SS. They hit at 3&4&5&6, from July 1943 on.

And keep your eyes on the frontline during the 1944-45 winter turns.

These three last things can really pose a threat to your army and thus adversely impact US morale. A US player will take more risk if the morale tracker is low.

Finally, the Volkssturm.

Don't enter Germany if you are not sure you can quickly run in Berlin's streets.

Activating the *zombie Volkssturm plan* is the last thing your generals want to deal with.

In 1944 an invasion of Norway may be considered or at least threatened, but it is not there that you should commit your main effort.

1940

After over 300 play-tests I have learned that there is no way to save France from surrendering, if the German player knows what to do and how to do it, but is only a matter of time (turns), dice and losses. The more the French player stays alive, the less pressure there will be on the UK player.

The French player, even if playing only a very short adventure in the 1940 scenarios, has to carefully deal with 3 key strategic choices.

First, as soon as Germany declares war on Belgium and The Netherlands, they must decide which of the 3 defensive plans will be used.

The historical plan, the *Dyle-Breda Plan* is very bad in terms of force deployment, as a smart German player will probably be more than happy to easily encircle the bulk of the French and BEF mobile forces, condemning the western allies to a quick defeat. But it has very good long term advantages, such as Lend Lease and flooding occupied western territories with partisans, thus preventing the German player recruiting the Dutch and Belgian Army from 1942...

The *Escheldt Plan*, on the other hand, will force the German player to face a

better deployed line, while sacrificing the Benelux Low Lands allies to a quick surrender and irremediably losing Lend Lease for the remainder of the game. Right in the middle there's the *Dyle Plan*, which has some good points, but also some bad ones.

The plan can be freely chosen by the French player or randomly, however the *Escheldt Plan* is not recommended while playing the 1940 scenarios and should be taken in consideration only in the future *Codeword Danzig Campaign*, as the Allies would get only the short term advantages, while not the long term adverse side effects.

The second decision the French player is called to take is to declare *Paris Open City* or not.

Moving the capital to Bordeaux gives some extra time and can really save England from defeat, but that means a quick, and sometimes premature, evacuation of the historical capital.

A smart German player however will try to avoid this option by moving a German GU in a hex adjacent to Paris. Finally, when there is no more hope of staying alive, offering the armistice will be very helpful in denying Germany the extra PPs it would have gained from surrendering French troops.

The German player has many good weapons to use to quickly win the war.

First, wisely choose the best hexes to launch your airborne formations: Den Haag (the Dutch capital), Rotterdam or Gent (closing the Antwerpen harbour), Eben Emael (negating the Fortress Bonus) are all good, but as you have only two airborne units, a choice must be made.

Also preserving both the 7th Flieger Division and the 22nd Luftlande at full strength will pose a great threat for the June turn, as they can be used again to hit the Allies in the rear (maybe landing in around London or directly over Coventry and Reading (destroying those factories). Thus, strong air cover is mandatory everytime you use your precious and expensive airborne units.

Talking of air cover, the two Stuka formations really can blast (6 dice at 5&6) enemy units in clear and reconned terrain, but remember to escort them with your valuable BF109 fighters.

To close the ring and trap the bulk of the allied formations moved in the lowlands (if any) you must clear the Calais hex with a strong air attack. In the Allied Strategic Warfare Phase of May a port bombardment is also

mandatory for those ports the British may use to reembark the BEF. Destroying the 3 BEF corps (or at least one or two) will make Seelowe affordable, as these units can be rebuilt at only the cadre level (the second step is blue).

Remember that the more Belgian and Dutch units you destroy, the less will surrender, providing you with precious extra resources.

After the fall of France, check the turn track: if it is already August, it is probably not wise to prepare for a landing in UK. Sooner is better. Otherwise feint it. In the brave attempt of getting a UK KO, first attack the radar chain, as it will otherwise diminish any chance of a successful invasion. It is mandatory you put and keep it out of service. Having your aircraft revealed and British Fighters rolling at 5&6 is not a good position to start from.

If you land, be sure your airborne units create a security ring area around the beach-head, otherwise you will soon find yourself in siege supply.

Always pin the British Fighter Command HQ to avoid RAF reaction.

The British player knows this very well and will try to keep his position hidden as much as possible and if necessary, will SRM it out of the LW bombers' reach.

1943

In 1943 **the Allies** have not completed their factory build up and technology breakthrough, so cannot challenge directly an expert German player army equipped with the new Tiger tank (TECH 3 in July 1943) in open field, but may however start to give him some bad headaches, grabbing some ground, and in for example provide the Italian King Vittorio Emanuele with a good reason to dismiss Mussolini. Landing in Sicily or in the fortified Cagliari harbour (the only available in range of 5 hexes) may initiate the process. The Allies have supremacy in the air and can land unopposed. Also, after landing they may mark and keep 3 Italian harbours wrecked for 1 turn. Choose them wisely, as this can be something that could turn against you.

Use your air power to pin any Axis air units on the ground and do not save any available units from combat. Operation Husky can be a very easy task to accomplish, but getting overconfident could turn an easy victory into an unpredictable disaster.

Decide what to do with the Hermann Goering Panzer Division in Reserve Mode.

You can airstrike it on the ground (but it has an extremely powerful antiair, hitting at 3&4&5&6) or wait and see if the Axis will send her to repel your invasion.

Players will discover that there are good reasons for both.

After Mussolini's dismissal, the Italians just need a final reason to abandon the war, so conquer the whole of Sicily or both Sardinia and Corsica and get them out of play.

After that, the German player will be forced to commit many troops here, otherwise the Allies will move fast into northern Italy, capture Mussolini and establish new air bases to put under threat any hexes in Central Europe.

The Axis player has few good units in Italy. While the new Italian armor corps has been just reformed in Rome (*Divisione Mussolini*) but not really ready for action, most of the Second Luftflotte has been wiped out in Sicily with the bulk of Italian Regia Aeronautica.

Soon two new Panzer Divisions (reduced Panzer Corps), the new 1st Fallschirmjager Corps and the 51st Mountain Corps will arrive and help to create a defensive line.

Choose wisely where to hold the Allies. Sooner is not necessarily better.

In the mean time don't involve the HG Division and the last fighter corps you have if not absolutely necessary. Lose them and you will be completely at the mercy of Allied airpower. Whenever it's possible, send one GU to rescue Mussolini and create the Repubblica Sociale Italiana.

RSI will not help you in winning the war, but may help you win the scenario. Use the RSI units (remember you can rebuild Italian units and the valuable forts) to counter partisan activity in the rear and to fortify your frontline positions, respectively.

Be reasonable. If the Allies crack your positions, retreat immediately, disband the forts (otherwise they will surrender), get 1 yellow PP and rebuild them 3-4 hexes north in the next turn.

Remember that after the Italian surrender, the German player cannot make any further naval Movement in the Mediterranean Sea and that all the Mediterranean Ports will no longer be valid supply sources, so don't count on them.

1944

In 1944 although everything is almost written in stone, the Axis and the dice still have the ability to change the outcome.

The Allies must choose a good landing area. The obvious choice would be the historical one, but also Pas de Calais has some good arguments going for it. Do not skip over the possibility to launch a diversionary landing in some unexpected areas. Norway and the Bay of Biscay are the best to instill fear in the heart of an experienced Axis player. As soon as you land in one of these unusual locations, you can either immediately obtain a harbour (Bergen?) or deploy 1 (not 2) Mulberry.

Keeping the second Mulberry available for a second invasion will again confuse the German player and force him to not commit every unit he can against you. When landing, remember to expand your beach head as soon as possible (airborne units).

Deploying the 2 Mulberries close to each other is very useful, as this will avoid siege supply.

A great strategy would be to land in the historical location, so the Cherbourg fort will go out of supply and surrender at the end of the July German turn, providing you with an extra harbour to readily resupply and rebuild your troops.

Remember that after *Operation Maple* any chance of using an Atlantic port as a valid supply source for the Axis is gone, but Festungs (7-steps orange blocks) do not surrender, even if out of supply. Historically *La Rochelle*, *Lorient*, *St. Nazaire* and *The Channel Islands* lasted till the end of the war.

Fortunately they can't move and don't exert ZOC. Ignore them and get to Paris and the Antwerpen harbour as soon as possible. The Axis player cannot disband them, so you will not face them while entering Germany.

Every Mulberry works as a major port: you can supply 5 units and bring offshore 5 production points, but also thanks to Pluto Pipelines you can deliver unlimited supplies of OIL.

You need at least 25 units in France, so the 2 Mulberries and Cherbourg are a good point to start from, but you may need more.

Mulberries also allow you to overstack up to 5 GUs in the same hex. This will prove to be a great advantage when the Germans throw the two SS Panzer Corps and the SS Artillery against you (they all hit at 3 when attacking) in a desperate attempt to push you back into the ocean.

The Axis player has 5 Armor Units in Reserve Mode, ready to react and repel any ill-planned invasion.

So don't get discouraged.

While the 58th Panzer Corps in Toulouse is probably too far from the landing area, the others are all well positioned. Also they cannot be air attacked/pinned if they are in a city (it is supposed that in 1940 you have accepted the French Armistice) and airborne units landing over a Panzer in reserve mode are immediately eliminated.

That said nobody will take away from you this possible reaction.

But react wisely and concentrate your forces in order to destroy as many enemy (especially US) units as possible. Then in the Axis phase, with the fresh incoming 2nd SS Panzer Corps you can count on a formidable *Speerspitze* able to wipe anything out, except a full stacked mulberry. Alternatively, you must do your best to contain the landing area, preventing too many ports from falling into the Allied hands. Too soon, at least.

Remember that while you can't disband red dotted forts/festungs, it is indeed wise to disband any supplied fort if it risks getting encircled and lost.

Getting 1 extra PP and the possibility to rebuild it in the next turn is better than losing it, granting 1PP to the Allies and delaying its rebuilt by 1 turn.

A wise and expert Allied player, after the landing in June, will use July to regroup around the beach head, and to get more troops into France.

If this is the case, don't get overconfident: he is not wasting time, he is preparing to encircle you (*Falaise*).

The solution is easy: run eastward before it is too late and remember that after the landing, the French Armistice bonus will be over and your units will be chased by enemy air in a game of cat-and-mouse. As soon as the Allies start posing a threat to the Reich, immediately rebuild the *Siegfried Line*. Those 9PP will be the best buy you can make.

If this last defensive line gets breached, don't get discouraged. You can still build forts in Germany and try to delay the Allies, while your scientists are developing the *Gottterdammerung*.

So anything is possible, but only if you still control both Berlin and Peenemunde.

The very last card you can play is the *Berlin Encirclement*: with a roll of 1 or 6, you will move the Reich capital to Munich or Obersaltzberg, even if the Fuhrer will lose any ability.

DESIGNER'S NOTES

BLOCKS IN THE WEST has been completely designed, developed and manufactured in Italy with German wood.

The game can be paired with BLOCKS IN THE EAST to recreate the overall WW2 conflict in Europe.

BLOCKS IN AFRIKA will not only add the units of both factions involved in the *North African Campaign*, but also all the minor powers units and Navies for all the powers involved.

The series has been developed from a single big game and then divided into 3 for space and marketing needs.

The basic and the advanced rules are thus the same in all the 3 games, while only some optional rules change from one game to another.

BLOCKS IN THE WEST does not have the same front density as BLOCKS IN THE EAST, but because of the campaign fragmentation and the importance of amphibious and airborne invasions, it is probably more difficult to master than BLOCKS IN THE EAST.

The games in this series haven't been particularly designed for entry level wargamers, but they can still play their role in their development. We all had to start somewhere!

Just remember to start playing the shortest scenario first with only the Basic Rules, and then, when you get confident with the game system and mechanisms, start adding more details, length and historical flavour.

We have spent hours of fun playing these amazing games and I hope you can experience the same enjoyment.

If you have any rules questions, you can visit www.ventonuovo.net, <http://www.boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/131393/blocks-in-the-west> or send your question via email to me, at the address below:

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ALL THE BEST

and **HAVE FUN!**

Emanuele Santandrea